

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: SKIN

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My work is a response to my search for identity and to my alienation as a refugee in particular, thus challenging all human condition. Through the use of domestic and textile artifacts I explore the traces of the feminine body in space, and the tension between traditional expectations and the cultural trauma of displacement. Forces like beauty and violence present in my work portray this tension.

SKIN

By

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Chapter 1: Skin

“To make people free is the aim of art, therefore art for me is the science of freedom.” Joseph Beuys

I was born in the year of Iranian revolution, which was followed by eight years of war between Iran and Iraq. I witnessed ongoing violations of human rights by the government, and then immigrated to live in exile in United States.

It is not only the oppression and darkness of these experiences that inspire my artwork, but also the bravery and endurance of those who suffered. Parents managed to teach their children love and happiness when there was nothing but hatred and violence in the midst of war. Mothers managed to teach their daughters beauty in a society where femininity was being covered, hidden and confined. I celebrate femininity through the socio/cultural mirror of Persian culture. My art originates in personal experience; however, it also addresses universal artistic, political and social ideas.

I use materials symbolically with isomorphic content. I reconstruct the memories of these experiences by using domestic materials of personal significance that explore the vestiges of the feminine body in space and trigger certain feelings or emotions. Wax, which is permanent and impermanent at the same time, freezes the objects at a certain point and preserves the memory of that instance. It freezes a moment of an action, like a captured scene in a photograph. In *Membrane* (Figure 1), this action occurs between two bodies. One is hand-painted as a symbol of tradition, the other

torn in a struggle between traditional expectations and the cultural trauma of displacement.



Figure 1. *Membrane* 2012

The body is present by its absence through the placement of garments. With each assemblage gesture, position and proximity show the figures' vulnerability and isolation. In *Imposed* (Figure 2) this is shown by creating tension between two objects used symbolically. Literally and metaphorically, we have three points of view here: male's, female's and spectator's.



Figure 2. *Imposed* 2013

My graduate education in fine art has been a constant exploration of the relationship between functional objects devoid of artistic merits and objects/images related to the matrix inherent in the complex concept of functionality. Examples of this are many and varied, but I can cite two specific artists whose work impacted mine: Alberto Giacometti and Joseph Beuys. Giacometti's sculptures of surreal figures also manifest the existential realities of the post-war experience. What I learned from Giacometti is

that art distorts real objects in order to move the onlooker from function to form and from there to an aesthetically inverted concept of absurdity. We can see in his work (Figure 3), the feminine figure distorted in such a way as to reinforce notions of transience, ephemerality and mutability. Similarly, (Figure 4), through distortion and mutation, I created an ephemeral context. I did so not using the female figure, rather, through the use of feminine items whose initial purpose is to idealize the female body.



Figure 3. Alberto Giacometti, *Tall Figure II & III* 1960



Figure 4. Details of *Farideh* 2013

Beuys also introduced me to the concept of art as social commentary, a concept that I have grappled with for years as a practicing artist. Beuys articulates this in a way that makes it both understandable and convincing. Working with such substances as fat and felt Beuys changes everyday objects, such as a piano, deliberately to erase or

annihilate their functionality. In doing so, he constantly blurs the lines between art and life and fact and fiction. As an artist from a rich poetic culture, I have noticed these tendencies mixed and mingled at times in highly productive and provocative ways with the store of poetic wisdom that I have absorbed throughout my life. There, I see a manner of artistic creativity that turns a mundane object such as clay into shapes that recall long dead human forms. As Omar Khayyam, a Persian poet, wrote:

“This clay pot like a lover once in heat

A lock of hair his senses did defeat

The handle that has made the bottleneck its own seat

Was once the embrace of a lover that entreat.”

I see the decomposed remains of human bodies which turn into clay with lips turning into edges, hands turning into handles, and the human neck assuming the function of a pot’s neck. In this tendency, I see the eternal and universal in discord; thus, human death giving birth to beautiful objects of clay.

In consort, I see another Persian poet, Hafez, who takes an object as mundane as a candle and infuses in it an image of a remorseful lover apologizing to his beloved for an unspecified transgression that he may have committed. In this way the figure of the candle with wax running down its length comes to express the feeling of guilt and sorrow.

“Who told you, my love, not to seek my condition

to become a stranger, shunning the familiar ones

because of your abundant grace, your generous habits

forgive my past transgression, seek not the majara
but if you wish to know the painful condition of the lover
contemplate the candle, ask not the zephyr”

My work constantly travels between skin and organ, outside and inside, surface and depth. I use the second skin (clothing) as a metaphor for the boundary between these notions and the relationship between body and space... “the body exists in space and space exists inside the body.” (James Elkins)

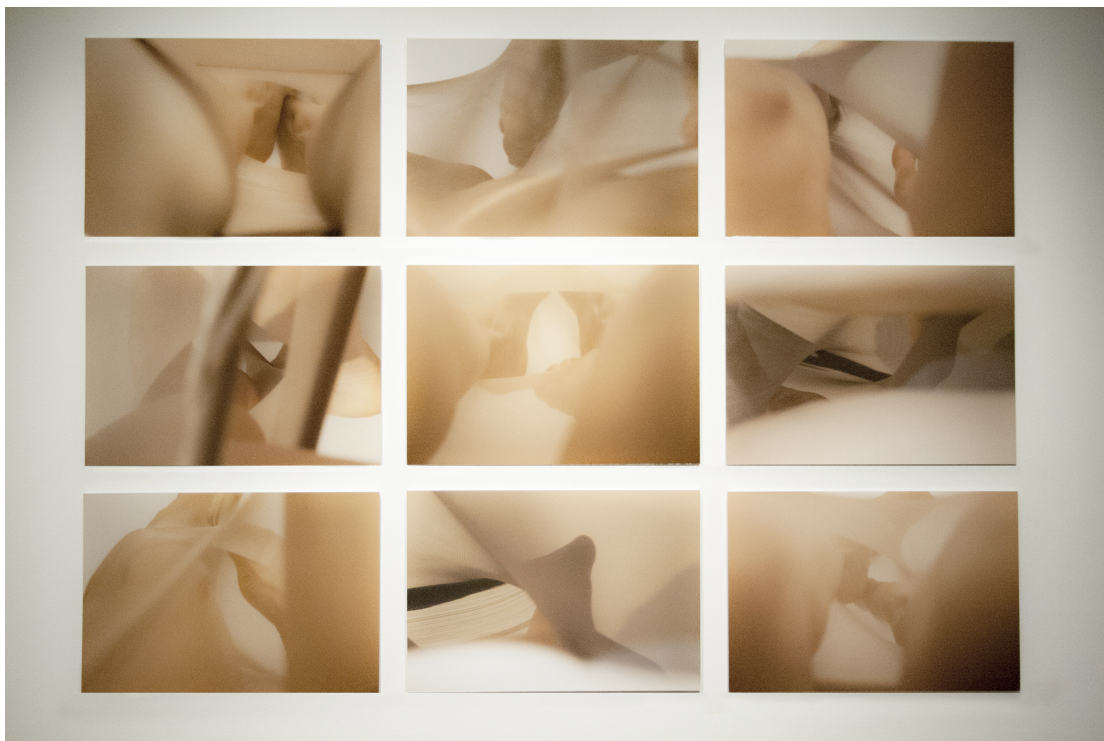


Figure 5. *Untitled*, Digital Photograph, 2013



Figure 6. *Farideh*, Pantyhose, Wax, Mixed Media, 2013



Figure 7. *Untitled*, video stills 2013



Figure 8. *Fatehis*, video stills 2013